

The Mystery of the Redheaded League

adapted from a story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
by Christopher McGraw



1 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had begun a career as a physician in London. But in 1887 his first novel was published, and it was so successful that Doyle soon gave up practicing medicine to devote himself to writing.

2 By the time he died, Doyle was famous all over the world, and the characters he created—Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson—were legendary. Holmes uses his intellect and keen observation to unravel mysteries that baffle the police; Dr. Watson is his admiring friend and

assistant. The story that follows is called “The Mystery of the Redheaded League.”

3 One chilly afternoon Dr. Watson arrived at the lodgings of his friend Sherlock Holmes. Watson found Holmes in his living room talking with a redheaded man. Holmes introduced Jabez Wilson, then asked him to repeat for Watson his fascinating story.

4 Wilson took a wrinkled newspaper from his pocket, and while he searched for the item he wanted, Watson studied him. What he saw was

- an average businessman, rather shabbily dressed, whose only unusual features were a fish tattoo on one wrist and his flaming hair.
- 5 When he noticed Watson studying the man, Holmes remarked, "Of course we observe that Mr. Wilson has visited China, and that he has recently done much writing."
- 6 Watson and Wilson were amazed. Wilson confirmed Holmes's statements, adding, "But how did you guess?"
- 7 "I didn't guess," replied Holmes rather proudly. "I analyzed. Your right sleeve is shiny near the cuff, and your left elbow is worn; obviously you've been writing a lot while resting your left arm on the desk. From my familiarity with tattoos, I recognize that yours was done in China. But to return to your problem, show Dr. Watson that newspaper item."
- 8 Wilson indicated a particular advertisement that read: "A job is available in the Redheaded League at four pounds weekly. Apply in person at 7 Pope's Court."
- 9 "Well," said Wilson, "my little pawnshop in Coburg Square barely earns me a living, and I couldn't even afford an assistant, except that I found one who works at half the usual wages to learn the business. He's a clever fellow, and my only complaint is that he's constantly taking photographs then running down to the cellar to develop them. But he's all right—he pointed out this advertisement to me. He was surprised I'd never heard of the League and said he wished he had my hair because it would certainly get me the job."
- 10 "He was so enthusiastic that I decided to apply for the job—and I got it!"
- 11 "What was it?" asked Holmes.
- 12 "Sitting at a desk for four hours each day copying the encyclopedia, which I've done now for eight weeks. But this morning when I arrived there, the door was padlocked, with a notice announcing that the Redheaded League had been dissolved—and the landlord insisted he'd never heard of them. I'd like to receive the money I've earned, which is why I'm here."
- 13 "A remarkable story, Mr. Wilson," said Holmes. "But tell me—what does your assistant look like?"
- 14 Wilson replied, "He's about thirty, I'd imagine. He is clean shaven, with a white mark on his forehead from a splash of acid."
- 15 Holmes looked at Watson and nodded. "Today is Saturday; we should have this mystery solved before Monday." He escorted Wilson from the room.
- 16 Then he turned to Watson. "Now, my friend, let's visit this shop—and this unusual assistant."
- 17 In Coburg Square Holmes and Watson wandered up and down, surveying the dingy neighborhood, and then knocked at the pawnshop. When the assistant answered, Holmes asked for directions to Piccadilly. The young man pointed and quickly closed the door.
- 18 "Now," said Holmes, "let's see what lies behind this square."
- 19 When he and Watson rounded the corner, they found a street as thriving as Coburg Square was run-down. On it were several busy shops and a well-known bank, which Holmes studied carefully.
- 20 "Watson," he said, "we must act tonight. Come with me."
- 21 Arriving at Holmes's house that night, Watson found two others there before him—Peter Jones, a police officer, and a man whom Holmes introduced as Mr. Merryweather, a director of the bank near the pawnshop.
- 22 The four set out quietly through the sleeping streets of London. When they arrived at the bank, Mr. Merryweather guided them down a narrow passageway, through a massive gate, and into an enormous vault crowded with boxes.
- 23 Holmes looked around. "Gentlemen," he announced, "make yourselves comfortable. You are surrounded by a fortune in gold. And our assistant pawnbroker will arrive shortly, intending to escape with it."
- 24 Eagerly, nervously, the four waited in total darkness. Then a sliver of light appeared in the cement floor. Suddenly a block of cement moved, then lifted, and the pawnshop assistant pulled himself out from beneath it. Sherlock Holmes grabbed him instantly.
- 25 "It's no use," said Holmes. "You're hopelessly cornered. But I congratulate you—the Redheaded League was a brilliant idea."
- 26 "I return the compliment," replied the assistant. "Only Sherlock Holmes could have thwarted my plan."
- 27 "You see, Watson," Holmes explained later, "it was perfectly obvious. The assistant wanted Wilson out of the way for a few hours every day, so he arranged to have Wilson hired by the so-called Redheaded League. Wilson was glad of the opportunity to earn some extra money, but of course the League was a magnificent hoax, dreamed up by the assistant and a friend."
- 28 "Each day while Wilson was out, the assistant secretly worked, undisturbed, in the cellar of the pawnshop. From there he burrowed a tunnel to beneath the bank vault around the corner. Surely when

he opened the door to us you noticed how worn the knees of his pants were. Evidently he'd been working hard on his knees for some time.

29 "When Wilson said that the League had been closed, I realized that the tunnel must be completed and that the time had come to capture the thief in the act."

30 *Doyle wrote fifty-six stories and four novels about Sherlock Holmes. If you read some of them, you will see more of Holmes's keen eye and sharp mind in action.*

COMPREHENSION

Write the letter of the best answer for each question.

- 1 Why does Wilson come to see Holmes?
 - a He thinks his assistant is stealing from him.
 - b He wants to ask Holmes for a job.
 - c He wants to get paid for his work at the Redheaded League.
- 2 In the end, where does Sherlock Holmes catch the assistant?
 - a In the bank vault
 - b In the pawnshop
 - c In the office of the Redheaded League
- 3 Why is the League dissolved?
 - a The tunnel to the bank is finished.
 - b They ran out of money to pay Wilson.
 - c The work of copying the encyclopedia is finished.

4 Which words best describe Holmes?

- a Shy and hardworking
- b Smart and observant
- c Clever but cruel

Read the facts below. If the fact helped Sherlock Holmes solve the mystery, write **Yes**. If it did not, write **No**.

- 5 Wilson has a tattoo.
- 6 The assistant spends hours in the cellar.
- 7 The bank is around the corner from the pawnshop.
- 8 Wilson's pay at the Redheaded League is four pounds a week.
- 9 The assistant knows the way to Piccadilly.

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

VOCABULARY

A You can often tell the meaning of a word by reading the words around it.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. Then find the word that fits the given meaning. Write the word.

- 1 very famous; well known (2)
- 2 mind; thinking power (2)
- 3 figure out (2)
- 4 owner of a building that is rented to others (12)
- 5 busy and successful (19)
- 6 narrow strip (24)
- 7 defeated; prevented from happening (26)
- 8 trick; fake (27)

B A word may have more than one meaning.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. See how the word in **bold type** is used in the paragraph. Decide whether it has meaning **a**, **b**, or **c**. Write **a**, **b**, or **c**.

9 **pounds** (8)

- a strikes
- b shelters for stray animals
- c money

10 **dissolved** (12)

- a melted
- b mixed with liquid
- c ended

WORD STUDY

- C** Many English words come from the Latin language and contain Latin roots. For example:

dict = to speak, tell (as in *dictate*)

port = to carry (as in *portable*)

sect = to divide (as in *section*)

Knowledge of Latin roots will help you unlock the meaning of new words. Read the sentences below. The word in **bold type** is a clue. It will help you find the correct Latin root to complete the partial word. Complete the word, and write it in full.

- 11 The _____er **carried** our suitcases to the train.
12 Her poor _____ion made her **speech** difficult to understand.
13 A pre_____ion is a statement that **tells** the future.
14 The class **divided** into groups to dis_____ the story.
15 The high cost of im_____s is partly due to the expense of **carrying** the goods great distances.
16 The act of **carrying** a boat overland is called _____age.
17 **Divide** the property into one-acre _____ions.
18 You will come to a **divided** highway after the inter_____ion of Root and Willow streets.

- D** I have been feeling **weak** this **week**.

Words that have the same sound but different spellings and meanings are sometimes called homophones. For example: *weak* and *week*. Each of the following sentences contains a pair of homophones in parentheses. Write the word that makes sense in the sentence.

- 19 People have known how to (we've, weave) for thousands of years.
20 The referee called a (fowl, foul) in the first minute of the game.

- 21 The ox was wearing a heavy wooden (yolk, yoke).
22 The sailor is home from the (see, sea).
23 These library books are (due, dew) tomorrow.
24 The chimney (flue, flew) has not been cleaned for fifty years.
25 I want some sandals with open (tows, toes).
26 The (sum, some) of nineteen and thirteen is thirty-two.

- E** Pups are **little** dogs, not **big** ones.

Words with opposite meanings are called antonyms. *Little* is an antonym of *big*. From the group of words below, choose an antonym for each word in **bold type** in the sentences. Write the antonym.

necessity fertile choppy cheerful
perilous absurd feeble green

- 27 I thought Mr. Osgood's plan was **reasonable**.
28 Flora's illness has left her very **strong**.
28 The race was rough because the lake was so **smooth**.
30 Terrible dust storms left much of our farmland **barren**.
31 Mountain climbing is a **safe** sport that has claimed many lives.
32 When the temperature is below freezing, a warm winter coat is a **luxury**.
33 This room looks much more **dismal** since we painted it and took down those heavy draperies.

Comprehension

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1 c | 6 Yes* |
| 2 a | 7 Yes* |
| 3 a | 8 No* |
| 4 b | 9 No* |
| 5 No* | |

If you missed any of the answers marked with a star (*), go to **Skill Builders Card** 234. Then come back to the Gold level.

Vocabulary

- | | | |
|----------|--------------------|-------------------|
| A | 1 legendary | 5 thriving |
| | 2 intellect | 6 sliver |
| | 3 unravel | 7 thwarted |
| | 4 landlord | 8 hoax |
| B | 9 c | 10 c |

Word Study

- | | | |
|----------|----------------------|------------------------|
| C | 11 porter | 15 imports |
| | 12 diction | 16 portage |
| | 13 prediction | 17 sections |
| | 14 dissect | 18 intersection |

If you missed three or more answers in Part C, go to **Skill Builders Cards** 59–60. Then come back to the Gold level.

- | | | |
|----------|-----------------|----------------|
| D | 19 weave | 23 due |
| | 20 foul | 24 flue |
| | 21 yoke | 25 toes |
| | 22 sea | 26 sum |

If you missed three or more answers in Part D, go to **Skill Builders Cards** 107–108. Then come back to the Gold level.

- | | | |
|----------|-------------------|---------------------|
| E | 27 absurd | 31 perilous |
| | 28 feeble | 32 necessity |
| | 29 choppy | 33 cheerful |
| | 30 fertile | |

If you missed two or more answers in Part E, go to **Skill Builders Card** 98. Then come back to the Gold level.